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Mine Action Support Group Update

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Mine Action Support Group Update

This article highlights the recent work of MASG.

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UNMAS Update

International Mine Action Standards (IMAS)

IMAS were issued in October 2001, as edition one, and have been generally very well accepted by the mine action community. To further promote the use of IMAS by National Mine Action authorities, it is planned to translate the IMAS glossary and guide for application into all the UN official languages and those languages that will be used by multiple programmes.

Quality Assurance Monitors

Recently four Quality Assurance Monitors (QAM) attended a Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) seminar in Washington hosted by the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation. The United Nations now has five QAM available for the LIS. Two QAM are deploying immediately to Somalia and Lebanon for the first intervention during the expert opinion collection phase; Other QAM have been allocated to Ethiopia, Azerbaijan and Bosnia-Herzegovina—LIS being undertaken prior to the end of this year. The Survey Action Center (SAC) conducted training for Azerbaijan senior staff, and training is planned for senior staff members for the LIS in Bosnia Herzegovina.

Evaluation of the Global Landmine Impact Survey

LISs represent a significant investment in both resources and time. Since the inception of the LIS process, surveys have been completed in Yemen, Chad, Thailand and Mozambique. Recently, the LIS in Cambodia was completed and this survey is now pending certification. The Survey Working Group and the Survey Action Centre intend to conduct an independent analysis of the value and utility of the LIS.

Victim Assistance

Work is progressing on the Victim Assistance Policy and consultations continued with UN partners in the IACG-MA. The draft of the policy has been circulated to UN Programme Manager's for comment and it is planned to circulate to the NGO community after comments have been received from the field.

Southern Lebanon

The coordinating role of the Mine Action Coordination Centre (MACC), which includes components from the UN, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the National Demining Office, is essential to the implementation of "Operation Emirates Solidarity" (OES) in southern Lebanon, which is funded by the UAE. OES mine clearance operations started in early May 2002, through deployment of two commercial companies, BACTEC and MINETECH, which are tasked according to priorities set by the MACC. BACTEC and MINETECH are conducting minefield clearance, essentially with manual demining teams, but using also mechanical flails machines, and Mine Detection Dogs to perform survey and area reduction activities. As of mid-September 2002, more than 2,000,000 square meters of land were cleared and handed over to communities, and more than 11,000 antipersonnel mines were destroyed.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The core team of a Mine Action Coordination Centre (MACC) was established in Kinshasa in January 2002, with one Regional Office in Kisangani, Eastern DRC. The MACC is acting as the focal point for mine action in the DRC. In this respect, an IMSMA database has been

established in Kinshasa and is being populated with information provided through an information collection mechanism set up within both the humanitarian community and MONUC. A commercial mine clearance company, MECHEM from South Africa, has been contracted by MONUC and to conduct technical surveys to facilitate further deployment of MONUC, initially in Kisangani and Kindu airports; unfortunately, as of mid-September initiation of the project has not yet been authorized by the RCD-Goma which controls Kisangani. Quality Assurance of MECHEM activities will be performed by MONUC with the technical assistance of the MACC. Sufficient funding (U.S. \$1,045,000) has been made available from voluntary contributions and MONUC assessed budget to support the MACC until the end of 2002.

However, there is an urgent need to deploy, a core mobile emergency mine/UXO clearance capacity to respond to humanitarian requirements, which is estimated to cost \$670,000. This would meet the emergency situations that have been identified so far, particularly in the Orientale and Equateur provinces.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)

As a result of the short but violent internal conflict of early 2001, it has been established that of the threat of mines and UXO by far the greater is that of UXO. It was estimated that 80 villages were affected to varying degrees by UXO, hampering safe return of about 100,000 IDPs and refugees. Following a request from the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, the United Nations Mine Action Office (MAO) was established in Skopje in September 2001. Working in close cooperation with the newly established Macedonian Mine Action Centre, the MAO is coordinating bilateral contributions to provide the national authorities with full capacity to deal with the mine/UXO problem. The MAO has also established, and is still managing, an IMSMA database, and is assisting both the UNHCR and the OSCE for assessing UXO clearance requirements prior to the return of refugees in UXO affected villages.

The International Trust Fund (ITF) deployed UXO clearance teams in Fall 2001, and again for the period April to June 2002; the ITF also trained and equipped 5 Macedonian teams of the Civil Protection Unit. As of mid-July 2002, about 55 villages were still affected, preventing return of an estimated 8,000 IDPs. The European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) decided to redirect funds to fund two international nongovernmental organisations (HI and CARE), which deployed additional UXO clearance teams in August in order to speed up the activities as much as possible before next winter. Initially established for a period of six months, it is now confirmed that assistance from the MAO will be required until the end of 2002, and appropriate funding has been made available for this purpose by the international community. Beyond 2002, it is foreseen that the Macedonian Mine Action Centre will have the capacity to deal with the residual problem, possibly with a limited technical assistance by the UN.

Afghanistan

Partnerships with the key development entities working in Afghanistan are under continued expansion. This includes the establishment of mechanisms to work with the significant contributions being provided by USAID, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank as they implement key reconstruction tasks. It is anticipated that these will include road repair and infrastructure recovery, as well as construction of major pipelines. In mid September, a multiple mine incident occurred in the vicinity of Bagram airbase, killing four MAPA deminers and injuring five others. The incident was initiated when a surveyor was killed by a booby-trapped mine, with the other casualties occurring when the ambulance evacuating him struck an anti-tank mine. All survivors received immediate treatment from the U.S. medical facilities within Bagram.

The Mine Action Centre staff is now approaching full strength, with the arrival of the new Chief of Operations, who had previously held this role in the UNMEE MACC. Other staff supporting administration, finance and logistics, information management and quality management have already arrived.

Eritrea

On 5 August 2002, the Commissioner for Coordination with the UN Peace-keeping Mission issued a letter to several international NGOs providing mine action assistance in Eritrea, directing that they cease their activities as of 31 August 2002, and hand over their assets and personnel to the Eritrean Demining Authority. This sudden cessation of international NGO operations came as a surprise to the mine action community in Eritrea.

The involved UN agencies and some members of the international community expressed concern to the government regarding this new direction for the national programme. In particular, concern was raised over the abrupt cessation of NGO activities and the resultant disruption to associated transition plans, the future intentions of the national programme regarding the principles of the International Mine Action Standards, and the transparency issues relating to the use of donor funded resources.

Notwithstanding these representations, the government remained firm regarding the cessation of mine action activities of most of the NGOs involved. The government direction has effectively resulted in the suspension of humanitarian mine action activities in the TSZ at least for the time being. Regrettably, accidents from mines and UXO continue.

Sudan

An international Technical Advisor (TA) arrived in Nairobi on 28 August and following a number of meeting/briefings then moved up to Lokichoggio on 1 September. He will ultimately be located in Rumbek where a permanent office will be established and equipped with IMSMA. Primary tasks include relationship building with SPLM counterparts and focusing on information gathering in support of the expected clearance requirements following a Machakos negotiated ceasefire. The office is currently going through the set up phase, and will develop working relationships with SPLM, UN OLS and local community before being in a position to effectively coordinate mine action activities.

The Mine Action Coordination Office in Kadugli (Nuba Mountains) is now very well established and has formally adopted the operational coordination role for the area. A number of mine clearance NGOs are currently preparing for operations and the UN TA is coordinating all such activity. A basic operational approach, designed to neutralise the mine/UXO threat in Nuba Mountains, has been developed and it is believed that if implemented will effectively address and resolve the problems caused by mine/UXO over a possible two-year time frame. The concept involves direct intervention to clear and open key routes throughout the area and to reduce, by technical survey, the larger mined areas down to their actual dangerous perimeter and then mark and fence. Longer term, follow-up, clearance may then be achieved by national assets with heavy responsibility transferred to the national authority. The three key aspects of this operational plan involve: task coordination, technical survey assets and extensive use of Explosive Detection Dog teams and were presented in three separate project proposals. Funding is currently sought to implement this decisive plan, which would result in the clearance of the Nuba Mountains within two years.

A suitable building to house a National Mine Action Office (NMAO) has been secured and is currently being equipped and staffed. The overall objective behind the establishment of such an office is to ensure that an effective policy, coordination and tasking structure will be in place to react to both immediate and longer-term mine action requirements, particularly in light of the Machakos process.

UK (LMA-UK) are implementing a project in the Nuba Mountains within the EU-funded SLIRI framework. Two international TAs are currently in-country, and the intention is to train and equip a total of 40 mine clearance personnel plus approximately 20-25 marking personnel. This total would be equally split between GoS and SPLM civil society. As the programme develops an additional two international TA would arrive to support the training and initial deployment. The intention is to train both groups jointly at the same location but if this were not politically feasible, separate training facilities would be established.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the government of Sudan, the Sudan People Liberation Movement and the United Nations on 19 September 2002 in Geneva regarding UN Mine Action Support to Sudan. Under this agreement, the UN will seek to assist both parties to jointly develop a National mine action strategy that meets the immediate needs of the emergency humanitarian situation and plans ahead to a post-conflict Sudan. Such a strategy will eventually lead to a mutually agreed National Mine Action Plan. A National Mine Action Office, supported by the UN and with representation of both parties, will be established to develop common strategies and prioritize the humanitarian clearance plan.

UNDP Update

Global Partnership Projects Management Exchange Programme

A Mine Action Exchange (MAX) programme was initiated in 2002, providing a mechanism for senior management staff of mine action programmes to undertake short assignments to other programmes, or if appropriate, with an international mine action organization. The purpose of the MAX is to develop and strengthen relationships and networks between indigenous mine action programmes and to share experiences and lessons learned. To date, four exchanges have taken place.

Management Training Courses

To date, over 100 senior and middle level managers from 20 countries have attended UNDP-sponsored courses organized by Cranfield University and its local partner institutions. A senior mine action management course has recently been completed. A number of middle management courses are currently being conducted in Pakistan for the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (MAPA). A Middle Managers Course is planned in late October for the Horn of Africa Region and Azerbaijan. UNDP continues to seek donor support for these courses.

Angola

A new Program Manager has arrived in the country. Donor interest is increasing, although some NGOs are still in need of urgent bridge funding. UNDP proposals for immediate and long-term response have previously been discussed.

Chad

A new Chief Technical Advisor arrived in mid-August, to be supported shortly by in-kind technical advisors from Switzerland. The first priority will be to develop a national strategy and mobilize resources to address priority areas. The mine action strategic plan, which supports the strategic national development plan, has been developed. In order to realize the plan, donor support is critical.

Croatia

The programme is in a mature stage with a competent national capacity developed. As such, UNDP technical assistance is being phased out. A technical advisor was deployed in July 2002, in what is anticipated as being the final phase of UNDP capacity building support to the Croatian Mine Action Programme. Discussions have recently been held within the government regarding responsibilities for mine action.

Iran

A new Project Document was signed in July 2002. The project seeks to improve the capacity of the government of Iran to adopt an integrated approach to mine action and establish a national coordination system, establish a mine action information system (IMSMA), and develop and introduce national standards within the framework of IMAS. A Chief Technical Advisor will be deployed shortly to support these objectives.

Laos

A new CTA will be deployed in November 2002. Serious funding shortfalls earlier in the year resulted in significant manpower reductions in both field operations and at the UXO LAO National Office and Training Centre. The funding situation has since improved and UXO LAO has received funds from a number of key donors. Pledges of support have also been received and a number of agreements are currently being finalised. This should lead to a restoration of the previous operational capacity, although concerns as to the long-term financial sustainability of the programme persist.

Somalia

A new CTA was deployed in June 2002. A Landmine Impact Survey is currently underway in Somalia. UNDP has completed a nine-month EOD training and supervision project implemented by the UK-based Mines Advisory Group (MAG). The aim was to provide a Training and Supervision Team with appropriate technical skills to conduct the training of existing Police personnel as EOD operatives. Originally planned to take place in NE Somalia, a deteriorating security situation caused the project to be undertaken instead in NW Somalia. Although carried out under difficult circumstances, the project outcomes were very positive.

Sri Lanka

UNDP is currently helping the government of Sri Lanka establish a national structure for mine

action. The first meeting of the National Steering Committee was held in the Prime Minister's Office in August 2002, and attended by Ministerial Secretaries, Ambassadors of donor countries, and the UN Resident Coordinator. A central National Mine Action Authority (NMAA) office has been established in Colombo and two District mine action offices (DMAOs) are to be centered on Jaffna and Vavuniya. Limited mine survey, marking, and clearance activities are being undertaken by RONCO, HALO Trust, and Mines Advisory Group. Other International NGOs have undertaken assessment missions with a view to participating in the expanding national mine action programme.

Yemen

With significant material assistance from the US government and the solid backing of key donors, the Yemen Mine Action Programme has doubled in size since 2000, and the aims of the first Five-Year Strategy are expected to be achieved ahead of schedule.

Significant improvements are being made in the care of mine survivors and plans are underway to extend the current programme. A second phase of the UNDP capacity building support project is due to commence in January 2003. Key objectives will include expanding humanitarian demining to all the 14 highly impacted areas; enhancing mine action quality assurance; and building capacity in IMSMA, logistics planning, management, and equipment maintenance. The total budget required for the second phase (2003–2005) is approximately \$6.6 million.

This information has been compiled from the recent MASG newsletter.

Contact Information

Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations
Chairman MASG: Mr. Stéphane De Loecker
Secretary MASG: Maj Filip Van Der Linden
Tel: (212) 378-6300
Fax: (212) 681-7618 or 681-7619
E-mail: MASG@diplobel.org

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